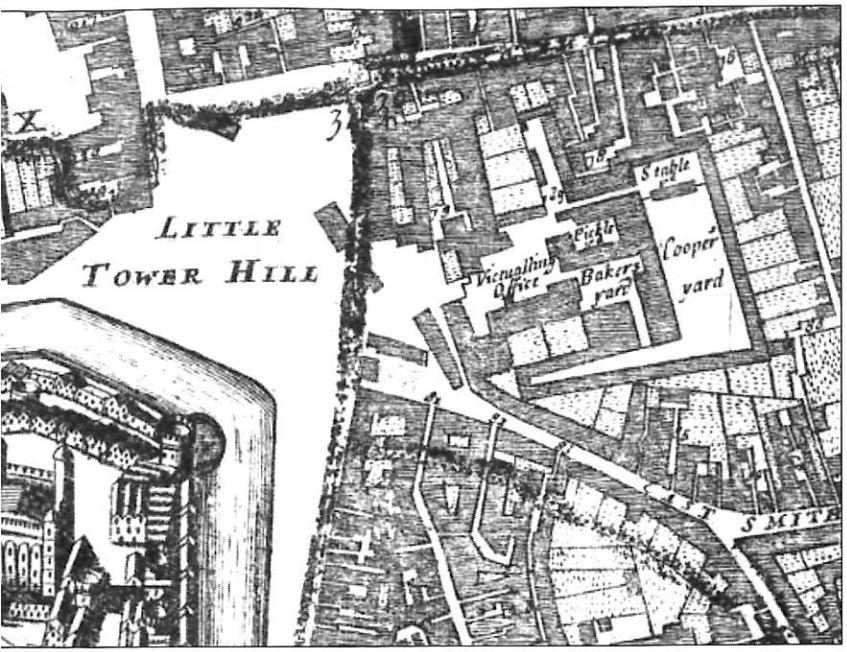

Detail from Morgan's 1682 map, showing the navy victualling office and yards in East Smithfield. Tower of London, bottom left.

ed for his fleet. The continued short-comings allow us to see how little real Pride had of succeeding in his role, dogged as it was by financial difficul- d a supply chain overburdened by demand. Naval supply was found wanting hout the period,[40] and no blame appears to have been levelled personally at or the shortfall during his tenure. Indeed, he should be credited with being continue to provision a fleet at all, irrespective of the quality of the goods. n aside, it is worth examining just why the navy victuallers were able to a ready supply of 'extraordinary strength' beer at the time of the supply From 1643, when excise was first imposed on beer, the authorities recog- nly two strengths of beer for tax purposes: 'small', which included the weak ge known as 'sea-beer', and 'strong'. But there was a loop-hole in the excise that extra-strong beer was only liable for tax at the same rate as 'ordinary' or on' strong beer. It was quite legal for a brewer or retailer to take one barrel of rdinary-strength beer and mix the contents with two barrels of small beer. sult would be three barrels of a beverage with a strength equal to that of on, strong beer, but for which the higher rate of excise had only been paid on rrel. The drink was known as 'Two Threads' or 'Three Threads', depending number of brews or different strengths involved in the mix. This was the why, in the summer of 1653, there was a ready supply of extra-strong beer

in stock: it was an easy way for brewers to reduce the amount of excise payable on their product.[41] We have already seen evidence of Pride attempting to avoid paying excise on the beer he produced (see chapter 8), but if he and his associate brewers had not been so unprincipled in paying their taxes the English fleet might never have been able to put to sea against the Dutch.

In May 1653 a detachment of Pride's foot had been appointed to the forty-six gun frigate *Sussex* as soldiers at sea (the term 'marine' in this period was not designate).[42] The English victory at the two-day battle of The Gabbard, off the Sussex coast, allowed the Commonwealth to secure the Channel and extend their control into the North Sea. The Dutch were driven back into their home ports and the United Provinces were thereafter subjected to an English naval blockade. On the 18 June *Sussex* put into Harwich laden with the fleet's sick and wounded, many suffering from fever and the onset of scurvy. So virulent and widespread was this sickness that rumour abounded of plague sweeping the English fleet. General Blake was reported to be so ill that a replacement was sought: 'we fear for his life; some report him dead, and that Col. Pride must be his successor'.[43]

Just how the rumour began that Pride was to take command of the fleet is unclear, though he was by this time quite a feature of the navy establishment. As well as the responsibility for victualling Pride was a burgess of the Portsmouth corporation, a post he had held since the previous year, when navy supply was under way and a close working-relationship with the town was needed. The office frequently included those with connections to the navy: other burgesses included George Monck and, in later years, Samuel Pepys and Admiral Byng. Pride himself was to be elected burgess twice more, in 1656 and 1658.[44] The fact that over 4,200 trees on Pride's Surrey estate were marked for use by the navy, 70% of the trees in the entire park,[45] further indicates that Pride was a figure with close navy associations during the early 1650s. It is interesting to conjecture whether, if Blake and Monck had both been killed, Pride would have taken command of the English fleet (and what the result might have been).

By August, the privations caused by the English blockade had forced the Dutch navy to attempt a break-out. The result was the largest engagement of the war thus far, a three-day running battle off the Dutch coast at Scheveningen, fought from the 8 to 10 August. The losses sustained by the English in terms of ships and men were serious enough to force them to break-off their blockade; likewise, high numbers of casualties among the Dutch sapped any remaining enthusiasm they may have had for continuing the war. Both sides were now willing to seek a political solution to the conflict. The extent to which Pride's foot soldiers were involved in the fighting with the Dutch is revealed in state papers, and a petition to the Admiralty made by a private soldier, Joshua Stevens, who was persuaded to seek compensation after losing his left hand, and a finger from his right, while serving at Scheveningen aboard *Sussex*.[46]

During October 1653 Pride's Regiment were guarding Dutch prisoners of war at Greenwich.[47] In February 1654 a further 100 soldiers were drawn out of the